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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author of several PM Story Books (used in schools with 5-, 6-, and 7-year-olds who are learning to read) discusses components of those books which she believes makes them successful. It attributes the success of these books to the following 4 ingredients: (1) traditional story structure having the elements of a central character with a problem and the solution of the problem; (2) a story which has meaning and does not bewilder children; (3) stories in a graded series designed to foster steady success, thus producing positive attitudes and desire for pleasure reading; and (4) stories with illustrations which are an integral part of the story and which further the meaning. Contains 43 references and 4 figures. (EF)

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Shaping the PM Story Books

Beverley Randell

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Shaping the PM Story Books

Beverley Randell, Children's Author

Editor's note: Beverley Randell's books have been published by 16 book publishers in six countries and in several languages. More than 25 million copies of her books had been sold around the world. Most of her books are stories for use in schools with 5, 6, and 7-year olds who are learning to read. In this article she shares the ingredients that have made the PM readers so successful as appropriate texts for emergent readers. Ms. Randell uses the New Zealand color system for describing the difficulty level of books; information in brackets provides the equivalent Reading Recovery level(s).

When I began to write the PM Story Books in the 1960s, I had been a classroom teacher for ten years and was concerned about the reading problems some children faced. Several months teaching in a remote one-teacher school in Marlborough was a valuable experience because country teaching was one-to-one. I had to learn what was going on in particular minds and adapt my teaching to suit. Writing was to have been a temporary interlude in a teaching life, but it became so engrossing (and fitted so well with my lifelong enthusiasm for children's books) that I did not return to the classroom after the interruption of marriage and family.

I have been a storyteller, working with the PM Story Books for nearly 40 years, beginning as an extremely raw amateur but learning along the way. However, even at the beginning I was quite certain about the importance of four ingredients: story structure, meaning, grading, and matching of illustrations and text. None of these were new ideas, but my contribution has been to combine them; this has been and still is a demanding juggling act.

First ingredient: Traditional story structure

I want to start by talking to you about *traditional story structure*, because I think it is so important, and because so many strengths flow from it. Any of the early PM Story Books that lacked it were culled when revision began in 1993. A traditional story has two elements: 1) the central character(s) has (have) a problem; and, 2) the problem is solved.

This very simple definition can be refined a little further. The pivot of the story is called the *climax*, or the moment of genuine doubt: Will the problem be solved or won't it? So, if you prefer, you can look for three parts in the story: 1) tension (caused by the problem); 2) climax (the will he? won't he? moment); and, 3) resolution (the problem is solved). In books for five- and six-year-olds, positive happy endings are emotional necessities.

I call these story elements *traditional story form* because that is what it is: traditional! It's unbelievably old! Homer used it in *The odyssey*, when Odysseus had all that trouble returning from Troy. Aesop used it in the story of *The lion and the mouse* 2500 years ago. Because this form is found in some of the world's shallowest stories (cliff-hanging adventures, magazine romances, pot-boiler films, Westerns and detective stories) some students have been taught to despise it. This is a foolish attitude, because it is also there in every

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Shakespearean play and every classic novel: you might as well despise the verb *to be* or eliminate the use of periods!

Traditional story structure is there, of course, in every quality children's picture book: *The story of Ping* (author not available), *Make way for ducklings* (McClosky), *Rosie's walk* (Hutchins), *Horton hatches the egg* (Seuss), *Mog the forgetful cat* (author not available), *Dogger* (Hughes), *Harry the dirty dog* (Zion), as well as in the timeless favorites such as *The three billy goats gruff* (traditional). When children listen to these tales in pin-drop silence it is because the strength of the storyline is holding them.

The PM Story Books, Red Level One [Level 3], are told with very few high frequency words; everyone in this audience knows what they are—***here, is, I, am, come, up, said, the, look, at, a, in, on, too***—laced with a handful of interest words. You would think that this extremely restricted vocabulary would make the possibility of a storyline less likely, but this is not so. Figure 1 illustrates the story structure that keeps these simple books alive. Look carefully at the problem that brings backbone to every early book.

Traditional story structure brings so many advantages. Look at these strengths, all flowing from story structure:

1. It gives motivation for reading and page turning: *everyone wants to know what will happen next*. Tension keeps interest alive.
2. It leads to *satisfying endings*, the reward of reading.
3. It gives many opportunities for the development *of logical thought*, and *the understanding of cause and effect*. Problem-solving requires thought; it is this firm framework of logic that supports prediction and helps self-correction. Story structure pushes the author into disciplined writing, and children into intelligent reading. (*Honey for Baby Bear* [Level 9] has a strong thread of cause and effect, and because of this it provides many opportunities for intelligent prediction. When Baby Hippo goes for a walk on p. 9 of the book of the same name, all children should be aware that the lions are planning to attack.)
4. It allows me, as an author, to present children in a favorable light as *successful problem solvers*, in many stories *raising their self esteem*. For example, Sally is a problem solver in *Locked out* [Level 11], so is Tom in *The big kick* [Level 4], and Jessica helps solve Daniel's problems in *The house in the tree* [Level 10]. Stories that lack traditional structure often wind-up with a last page that puts someone down in a desperate last minute attempt at humor, as in *Grandma comes to stay*, (Ready to Read, 1963.)
5. It needs words. Story telling requires *the precise and proper use of language*, that is, the need to explain clearly, to change pace, to choose just the right words to build tension and so on; this signifies a literary approach. Books without story structure can be littered with mindless repetition, with unfocused ramblings, or tend to be very short because the author has no need to use words. Using words means that the corpus of known and half-familiar, high frequency words are used *again and again in many different ways* and children have a better chance of mastering them.
6. It avoids the dangers of parroting, that is, *over dependence on oral memory* caused by a diet of repetitive books. The writer who is telling a story has a

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Figure 1: Traditional Story Structure in the PM Story Books

Title	Problem	Climax	Resolution
Wake up, Dad (1963) 14 words*	Dad won't get up.	Mom's arrival (the . heavy brigade).	Dad gets out of bed (with a bump).
*The photo book (1973) 13 words**	Why is there a blank space?	Teddy has his photo taken. Has this something to do with the blank space?	Yes! The family page in the album is complete.
Hedgehog is hungry (1968) 17 words*	In the spring a newly active hedgehog is ravenous	. . . .	. . . He eats and eats. (The final statement, "Hedgehog is hungry in the spring, states the plot of the book.)
The merry-go-round 20 words*	Nick is unhappy (1973) about Dad's choice of a ride for him . . .	. . . until he spots his own preference . . .	. . . and climbs on, triumphantly.
The lazy pig (1973) 18 words*	All the other animals have been up since sunrise - but not the lazy pig!	Food arrives - will the pig get up or not?	She does.
Tiger tiger (1973) 15 words*	Adventurous Baby Monkey runs into dreadful danger . . .	. . . is nearly caught . . .	. . . but escapes in the nick of time.

* Word count is for the number of different words in each story.

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good reason to use a wide variety of structures, and this means that children have to pay close attention to print. (*Wake up Dad*, Red Level One [Level 3], has good variety for a story that uses only 14 different words.)

Second ingredient: Meaning (not second in importance!)

Meaning is something that all writers, publishers and teachers pay lip service to; they *think* they care about meaning. All I can say is that the team who work with the PM Library cares profoundly about meaning on every level, all of the time.

A word about my team: it began as a group of classroom teachers and assistant principals in Hamilton and Auckland who were very keen to see the revised PM Story Books back in print. As 1993 wore on, the two who were the most highly motivated and prepared to put the time into the task were Annette Smith and Jenny Giles. Jenny is the author of *Come on Tim* [Level 11], *Late for football* [Level 11], and *The cross country race* [14]; Annette is the author of *Tiny and the big wave* and *Teasing Dad* as well as the teachers' guides to the PM Story Books. In every meeting we have, the three of us focus on meaning. We know that in every story we are trying to make contact with the minds of small children. Meaning affects the choice of every subject, meaning is the thread of logic that runs through every story, meaning shapes every page, every paragraph, every sentence, and every illustration.

We would tell each other, as we revised the books, which stories (or pages) caused confusion and were best forgotten, and which stories had children totally involved. Every change made to the original texts increased children's chance of getting meaning from the printed sentences. As we worked, we had 30 years of children's reading echoing in our ears, helping us with our judgments. Every new story is tested in the same way: is the meaning clear and strong?

Meaning matters, but the teaching profession has been slow to recognize its importance. Decoding used to be the only important skill taught, and meaning in reading was often ignored. Ninety years ago children struggled with such extraordinary sentences as, "Get the gum for Tim to gum the rim to the fan!" But these days we look for *meaning*. We say to children, "Does it make sense?" and are thrilled when they self-correct, worried if they are slow to do so.

Our modern, sensible and unshakable belief in the importance of self-correction affects every book we write and our choice of subject matter. We stick to concepts children can grasp. Every book has to make good sense; in the PM Story Books, you will find no traces of mad fantasy, certainly no hint of the supernatural, and the very minimum of surprise twists in the plots. How can five year-old children possibly be asked to self-correct if they are asked to read stories about ghosts or witches? The supernatural, by very definition, makes prediction and reasoning impossible.

Unexpected words such as, "Humding-dory," defy prediction and self-correction. If the books we ask children to read have no connection with reality and experience, those precious opportunities for reasoning and self-correction fly out of the window. The fantasy I do include (e.g., the Bear family) is something that children can grasp very easily. I follow this rule: *Never bewilder children!* Even so, there will be occasional mismatches for some children because their experiences differ. It is hard enough to make things clear to children even when we start from a firm base of reality. I remember Nicky, aged six, who was reading *Ben's dad* [Level 7]. Nicky's experience meant it was bad news when his violent dad came home, and so he had no understanding of the theme of the book, Ben's longing for his dad.

Third ingredient: Meticulous grading that gives children the reward of success

My original ambition/dream was to supply children with a gently ascending set of interesting books: if children could read one, they should be able to read the next and the next. Steady success produces positive attitudes and leads to frequent and voluntary rereading for pleasure which leads to the consolidation of a whole raft of important new-found reading skills. Careful grading avoids hours

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of useless frustration-level attempts at reading. The reward that children want, and that they must get from day one, is the immediate feedback of meaning gained from the printed word.

The reward of meaningfulness is fundamental, and when children get it they are successful readers. Success is a reward every time they pick up a book. Failure in reading is damaging emotionally, and it can damage reading skills; failure may cement inappropriate strategies in place.

John books:

Janet, Janet
See the boats.
Come and look.
See the boats.

(This lacked tension and resolution!)

I was **shocked**, because the new Ready to Read little books, a mere 12 of them, were obviously going to be very difficult indeed, with a rate of new word introduction (1 in 10), far steeper than the rate used in Janet and John.

Let's look at those rates. The Janet and John books had one new word in every 20 running words (a rate recommended by Edwin Dolch). In practice, because the Janet and John books were well supported by a parallel set of 32 My Little Books, the rate was slowed to 1 in 40, and as the teaching method used with Janet and John in New Zealand involved children in hours and hours of (rather dull) blackboard pre-reading, one new word in every 50 or 60 running words was probably some children's experience. So, Janet and John had an easy rate of new word introduction, Ready to Read a steep one.

The PM writers at an editorial meeting.
From left: Annette Smith, Beverley Randell, and Jenny Giles.

Back in the early 1960s, when I saw proofs of the first 12 Ready to Read "little books" (intended to replace the earlier Janet and John books), I was both delighted and shocked. **Delighted**, because the stated aim of the author, Myrtle Simpson, and her editor Pat Hattaway, was that children should be supplied with real stories as soon as they had mastered 20 or so basic words and could leave repetitive caption books behind. The weakness of the Janet and John books (and of every reading series used in previous decades) was that there was no proper story content in the first year of reading instruction. Sense of a sort had arrived with Janet and John and so had meticulous grading, but there were no real stories in the early Janet and

The Ready to Read theorists rightly insisted on the abolition of all the grinding blackboard pre-teaching and practice; from the moment that Ready to Read came in, words were meant to be deciphered in the *books*, in context, bringing insights that would lead to more independence, more skill with word analysis and greater joy. It was obvious both to me and to the editors of Ready to Read that the 12 Ready to Read books would have to be reinforced by many supporting books because 1 new word in 10 running words was much too difficult. Children's unfamiliarity with the words would make the context crumble and deprive them of independence. One new word in 10 running words would definitely ensure "frustration level" reading.

That was why I worked for 15 years (1961-76) to produce graded books using the Ready to Read basic vocabulary, to slow down Ready to Read's very steep rates of new word introduction to a gradient that average children could cope with, and get the reward of success they needed—without descending to pointless reading 'exercises.' Each book had to be a story.

The PM Story Books were, and still are, a carefully graded series that introduces basic sight (i.e., high frequency) words in small batches, never more than five in a book, and often fewer. These high frequency words accumulate until (in the revised series) about 150 are mastered by the end of the Blue level [Levels 9-11], 250 by the end of Green [Levels 12-14], 350 by the end of Orange [Levels 15 and 16], and 450 by the end of Turquoise [Levels 17 and 18]. Each book draws on the same growing collection of heavy duty words so that these are practically the same in all books of comparable levels of difficulty. These words appear again and again as the series progresses. Myrtle Simpson and Pat Hattaway invented the intelligent division of vocabulary into *basic sight words* and *interest* words. Most books contain specialized interest words not found in other books (*photo, hedgehog, tiger, monkey, bulldozer* , etc) allowing for a welcome variety of subject matter.

When the PM Story Books were revised in 1993, all of the original Ready to Read books except *Saturday morning* were out of print. The old framework had gone. So, although I was keeping the framework, I had a wonderful opportunity to improve it. I consulted Warwick

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Elley's research published as, *A New Zealand basic word list* (NZCER, 1977). A total of 33,000 running words from the writing of many young children (seven year olds) had been analyzed. I knew from this which were the words with the highest frequency from the child's point of view (see Figure 2). So ***my***, for example, not used in the original Ready to Read books until the Blue level [Levels 9-11], is, in the new PM Story Books, "promoted" to Yellow [Levels 6-8]. ***One*** and ***some***, not used until Green [Levels 12-14], were promoted to Blue [Levels 9-11]. ***Was***, never used in the Ready to Read little books, now comes in at the Green level [Levels 12-14]. All four words were in the top 25 of Elley's list, and it was obviously silly not to use them when stories demanded it. Children gain insights from their own writing, and it was a good idea to reflect this much-used writing vocabulary in their early reading books.

In this way we amended the original Ready to Read word list for each level but kept a very careful eye on the new vocabulary load in every book. Our adaptation was not just a matter of adding the words with the highest frequencies. We postponed the introduction of some of the least useful Ready to Read basic words, for example ***meet*** and ***tomorrow***, which just didn't want to repeat themselves and which were obviously not high frequency words at all. We replaced the stiff ***cannot*** with the more common contraction ***can't***, and so on. Elley's list showed that children were more comfortable with the past tense, using ***came*** more often than ***come***, ***got*** before ***get***, ***had*** before ***have***, ***saw*** before ***see***, and so on, and this justified my decision to use the storyteller's past tense wherever I could.

A measured rate of new word and high frequency word introduction is not the only control that makes the PM Story Books finely graded. We tested every sentence for meaning by weighing every phrase (each meaning "chunk") against our combined knowledge of what children could cope with. Our criterion was simple: *was the meaning coming through*? If any one of us sniffed a hint of possible bewilderment we worked away at the sentence or the page until all of us were satisfied. Grading isn't just a matter of using known high frequency words; it is a matter of using clear sentence structure, too, which is related to children's control of normal spoken English and to the rhythms of story-teller's English.

Figure 2: Top 25 Words in Children's Writing (Elley)

and	I	a	to	we
my	was	went	it	in
on	is	he	had	the
* when	got	play	go	some
at	one	with	they	she

**When* is not used in the PM Story Books until Orange level [Levels 15 and 16], to avoid confusion with *where*.

But children's skills grow. By the Green level [Levels 12-14], some of our sentences are two-clause, multiphrased constructions linking cause and effect, as these examples demonstrate:

"Out at sea
the wind came up,
and the waves
got bigger and bigger"
(*The naughty Ann*) [Level 12].

"Then after the sun went down,
the mouse came out of her hole"
(*The lion and the mouse*) [Level 12].

These constructions are a long way from the very simple: "James is up. Kate is up," (*Wake up, Dad*) [Level 3] construction we use at the Red level [Levels 3-5]. You can see that we think it is right that children should be challenged by longer sentences when they are ready. The PM Story Books allow children to grow in skill. (It will be interesting to hear your comments about children's ability to control these new complexities.)

If a story needed too many new words for the intended level, we slotted it in at a higher level instead, or we removed some of the perceived difficulties. There is nothing careless about those coloured petals on the back covers. For some books, the petals show two adjacent levels, as grading depends on many factors, and the precise level is a matter of opinion. Teacher judgement matters a lot and always will, and the unknown factor is always the experience that particular children have had. It is easier to read *The naughty Ann* [Level 12] if you have set foot on a boat!

Since 1980, as you know, this structured approach to writing books for beginners has been heavily attacked. The new Ready to Read (1982-86) scheme

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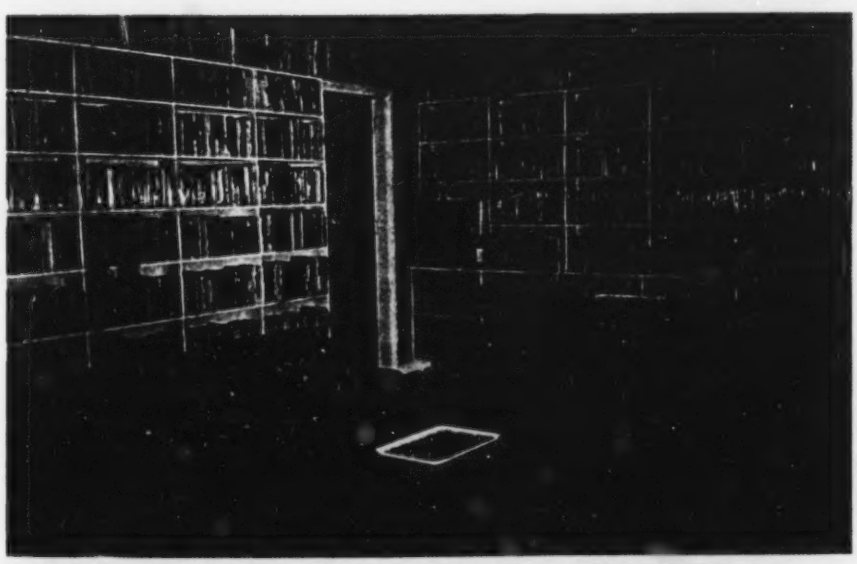

A room in Beverley Randell's house, showing part of her daughter's collection of children's books (described in the article "Shaping the PM Story Books"). The Susan Price Collection belongs to the National Library of New Zealand but is still housed at 24 Glasgow St, Kelburn, Wellington, 6005, where visitors are welcome.

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reflected a world-wide fashion inappropriately dubbed 'whole language.' Invited authors were told not to be constrained by any word lists or sentence 'formulae' (whatever that may mean) but to set up their own 'direct dialogue' with young readers. The theory was that 75% of English words were so common that they would be mastered easily from unstructured books. "Learning to read is very similar to learning to talk," authors were told: it all sounded deceptively reasonable!!

The result of this attitude toward texts for five- and six-year-olds was a mistrust of controlled vocabulary. It was thought to be unacceptably "contrived." So the new Ready to Read (1982) in comparison with the old (1963) became a set of books more or less unrelated to each other. Little attention was paid to the consolidation of high frequency words that children had recently met.

The assumption that an unstructured reading environment would enable all children to progress faster was challenged by Marie Clay in, *Reading: The patterning of complex behaviour* (1972):

"While creative, varied or flexible approaches to writing and reading seem appropriate for high progress readers, slow progress readers have greater difficulty discovering the regularities in such a rich reading environment. For them there is reason to make the regularities so obvious that they trip over them in the same place on several occasions. Regular contact with familiar material in familiar settings will suit the slow reader better than trying to force on him a flexibility of which he is not yet capable with texts whose characteristics vary widely ... .

"Very careful attention should be paid to any difficulty order in the series of reading books ... children never recover their balance after well-intentioned but unwarranted acceleration" (p. 92).

The assumption that high frequency words would take care of themselves ignored Warwick Elley's (1977) findings (see Figure 3) that naturally occurring frequencies are extraordinarily low. ***They***, for example, had a 0.5% frequency rating in children's free writing; most children will have occasion to write ***they*** once only in 200 words! (When adults write stories for children they don't include five sentences in a row starting with ***So*** or ***And*** or ***Then*** and therefore naturally occurring word frequencies in children's books are even lower than in children's own writing.)

English has large numbers of very similar high frequency words (see Figure 3) that inevitably confuse beginners if they are presented in quick succession. It is not surprising that many children feel defeated every time they see a word beginning with *th, a,* or *w*. At five years old they haven't the skills in auditory discrimination, accurate pronunciation, visual discrimination, letter-sound sequencing, phonic analysis or phonic synthesis that allow them to sort out ***want*** and ***won't***, or ***where*** and ***were***, or ***way*** and ***why***. Context doesn't help unless 95% of the surrounding words are known.

Figure 3: Similar High Frequency Words

the	an	we
they	am	went
their	as	want
there	at	won't
then	are	what
them	and	when
these	any	where
three	all	were
this	ago	with
those	away	will
these	again	well
that	after	way
than		was
		who
		why

Even when children are capable of writing their own news and stories this problem with similar and confusing words does not go away. Elley's research shows us that ***then***, a very 'common' word, is used less than once in two hundred words (0.388%) in the writing of seven-year-olds. As far as young writers are concerned, few words are common! Elley's 'top' word ***and*** makes up only 5% of children's writing! Elley discovered that ***and*** had a frequency level of 5%, ***I*** had a frequency level of 4%, ***a*** had a frequency level of 3%, ***to*** had a frequency

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level of 2.7%, and *we* had a frequency level of 1.6%. These percentages mean that even in a passage of a hundred words most children will have cause to write the word ***and*** five times only. Astonishing!

The frequency rate drops very sharply; ***she*** scored only 0.45%, less often than once in every 200 words. The conclusion is clear: even for seven-year-olds few words are common, even when they are capable of writing a 200-word passage. If you think that children will learn large numbers of important high frequency words from their own writing you are going to have to wait a long time. Reading has to be learned from books too, or else exposure to most words remains too low for mastery.

If writers of books for beginners are *not* allowed to introduce these confusing words in an agreed sequence, so that each word has a chance of becoming familiar before the next arrive, then there is only one course they can follow. Writers are thrown back on too intensive use of sentence repetition, usually in the form of one (or two) line captions. (There is a place for repetitive caption books, but not after the emergent reading stage. Myrtle Simpson described these books with enthusiasm but only as books for beginners.)

The first caption in the book establishes the pattern, which is repeated on the next half dozen pages, and then the author has to round off the book somehow, perhaps with a humorous twist. This is an excellent way of constructing an easy book for raw beginners, but trouble occurs if this style of text is over-used and especially if it is used beyond the Red level [Levels 3-5] as the main 'approach' to reading.

Repetitive books have four built-in weaknesses:

1. To read caption books children can *rely on their superb oral memories alone, and fail to focus on the print.* They can develop quite the wrong concepts about the reading task. A failure to focus on particular words, and the development of the wrong concept (i. e., that reading is a matter of repeating oral language) means that many children are not learning high frequency words (not learning to *read* at all).
2. If authors have to repeat the same structure on every page, *traditional story structure is hamstrung.* Sentence repetition is a thought-limiting straight jacket. Direct dialogue with children is an immediate casualty, as only the one (artificial) style of story can be told. There are some exceptions: Joy Cowley's *Greedy cat* [Level 11] is a great success. However, repetitive pattern yields very few 'real' stories.
3. Almost by definition caption books are short, and if daily exposure to reading is limited to a book a day children do not get enough practice. Most repetitive caption books, even the more 'advanced' ones, give children about 50 running words, whereas *Locked out* (also graded at the Blue level) [Level 11] gives them 200 words: four times the reading. . . four times the practice.
4. Repetitive stories, by their very structure, lead readers to expect a joke on the last page. Jokes are sometimes delightful, but a constant diet of flippancy divorces reading from real life and deeper thought. It is much more useful to present children with stories based on cause and effect. The ability to look at evidence and make logical predictions is a necessary skill, very much part of the reading process, and one that should be fostered. It is logic that triggers self-correction.

Since 1982 too many of these repetitive, flippant caption style books have been published. I know why it was felt that vocabulary rationing was a mistake. It led, at the Red [Levels 3-5] and Yellow [Levels 6-8] levels, to a certain stiffness (having wrestled with this stiffness for so long, no one knows this better than I!!) However, the alternative (repetitive sentences in every book met in the first 12 months) has, I think, led to worse troubles: texts that can be "read" from oral memory alone, and authors in fetters, held to the trivial because children who have mastered only a few high frequency words have not the reading skill to follow a logical train of written thought. Thought itself has been undermined, and shallow, largely meaningless books were just as common in 1990 as they were in the Janet and John days. Several publishers decided to copy Ready to Read and produce repetitive caption style books well beyond the emergent level, thinking that this was a "modern" and satisfactory way of teaching reading, but I think they were mistaken.

Fourth ingredient: Meticulous care with illustrations that match the text

Our illustrations have to work very hard because they help children gain maximum understanding as they match picture and text. The details have to be perfect, and the clarity outstanding; nothing else will do. The illustrations are visualized at the layout stage, described or sketched carefully by me, and the artist follows this meticulous brief. Jenny Giles, Annette Smith, I, and the highly critical skilled production team in Australia crawl over the pencil roughs and demand changes wherever anything is obscure and/or doesn't support the text, and the artist has to comply. In no books did the often brilliant artists get things right the first time around, because our demands were so exacting. In the PM Story Books, the illustrations are an integral part of the story and push the meaning along; they are not just bright and eye-catching decorations.

I have stressed four ingredients, all of them present in all PM Story Books: story structure, meaning, meticulous grading, and illustrations that match the text, but these four are just the beginning. We care about many other ingredients (most of which are mentioned on p. 5 of *Guide to the PM Story Books*.) Some of these other ingredients are:

5. The use of sentence structures that children can understand and control.
6. Concern for the rhythms of both spoken and story-teller's English.
7. Concern for safety, always. (For example, wearing sunhats, care near water, care with matches and fire, wearing safety helmets and seat belts, security with house keys, the maxim, "Stay where you are" (what to do when lost)). Every book is checked for intrinsic safety messages.
8. Careful typography: letter forms, word spacing, line spacing, line turn-

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arounds, punctuation and layout. (I owe a huge debt to Marie Clay whose insights of 30 years ago threw so much light on these matters. Her detailed observations about word spacing and layout were invaluable.) Teachers insisted that the font we used for beginners must be close to the printed letters children write, and this meant special adaptations because no one traditional font provided exactly what they wanted: open *a* and *g*, a capital *I* with serifs, *t* without a hook, *q* and *j* with distinctly shaped descenders.

9. Care with race, gender, age, and family types: no stereotyping.
10. Characterization. Characters are true to themselves within each book and in every sequel. This is important because the PM Story Books Sets A and B include several subseries, among them:
    - 7 books about Kate, James and Nick (who is often strongly assertive);
    - 8 books about the Bear family (with human ways);
    - 8 books about Sally, an active child who likes the outdoors and whose parents are separated;
    - 8 books about Ben's family who care about books and about Ben who loves drawing;
    - 6 books about Sam and Rachel who always have fun;
    - 7 books about Tom whose mum is pregnant and has a baby (Tom has a caring personality);
    - 5 books about Tim who is keen on sports;
    - 5 books about Jonathan who lives in a city and is black;
    - 4 books about Jessica who mothers Daniel because their own mother is missing.
11. Many stories ring true because they are based on real life incidents. Literary quality, even at this simple level, is connected with truth and honesty.
12. Emotional sensitivity. Though I don't mind laughing at adults (*Wake up Dad*, [Level 3], *Sally's red bucket* [Level 8]), I never laugh at a child nor put one down. This was a fault in the early Ready to Read books; for example, naughty Sally, naughty Timothy, naughty Richard—the frequent use of this 'naughty' idea as a climax on the last page was a pity.
13. Respect for animals. These are not figures of fun, either. Crazy humor, cartoon style, is avoided—the emphasis is on the real problems real animals have to solve. Considerable accuracy helps children develop scientific attitudes toward spiders, lizards, dinosaurs, seagulls, penguins, ducks, dogs, cats, sheep, mice, hedgehogs, kangaroos, and so on. Exceptions are (a) the retold fables which are about people disguised as animals. No one could claim that *The lion and the mouse* [Level 9] is based on scientific accuracy! And (b) the Bear Family, (who have very human ways.) There are useful links between PM Story Books about animals and PM Animal Facts books (non-fiction from Orange level [Levels 15 and 16] upwards).
14. A wide spread of subjects. Variety helps to hook more children on to reading. A variety of text types (fiction, non-fiction, verse for reading-along) is found in the PM Library.
15. Care with names which are always easier to read if children have heard them before. The names of the 1950s have been replaced with the most popular names of the 1990s.
16. Attractive appearance. The format is that of a small picture book: shiny cover, separate title page, numbered pages. In the 1960s the cover designs of school readers were relatively dull and stressed the 'series' idea, making both Ready to Read and PM Story Books look like 'school' books. Now they look like real books. They are, and this is a welcome, though expensive, development. (Few teachers are aware that 50% of the manufacturing cost of a book lies in its cover.)

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17. Unobtrusive grading indicated by colored daisy petals on the back covers; these look like a logo but provide swift information for busy teachers.
18. Reading to children. Because we care profoundly about reading to children, daily and often, we have told our artists to include real picture books—favorite bed time stories—in their illustrations, hoping that this will jog teachers to find copies and read the stories aloud. (See Figure 4.) Children are fascinated when books link up in this way.

Figure 4: Some Examples of Children's Books to Spot in PM Story Books

Carle, *The very hungry caterpillar* (in *Tom is brave* [Level 5])

Kerr, *Mog the forgetful cat* (in *Ben's tooth* [Level 13])

Randell, *John the mouse* (in *Our Mum*)

Ireson, *Rhyme time* and Hughes, *Dogger* (in *The best cake* [Level 10] and *Candlelight* [Level 12])

Zion, *Harry the dirty dog*; Burton, *The little house*; and, Hutchins, *Rosie's walk* (in *Tim's favourite toy*)

If you want to know what books have always meant to me and my family, read *Books for life* (1991) by my daughter Susan Price. Perhaps, more than anything else, the ingredient that has shaped the PM Story Books has been my lifelong passion for good children's books. I have used the best of the books in Susan's 15,000 book library to show me a standard of excellence to follow.

In conclusion, my aim has never varied. I believe that books used for learning to read should have the same qualities as good picture story books, and should be shaped to bring children success, not failure; enjoyment, not boredom; and, understanding, not bewilderment.

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